

Inside Report . . . By Rowland Evans and Robert Novak

Switch on Birch?

Part 1/15

WORKING quietly in the background, right-wing Republicans are trying to sink the anti-John Birch Society resolution before it's even floated at the high-level Republican Coordinating Committee here Dec. 13.

Accordingly, in prospect is another bitter battle between the liberal-to-moderate Republicans and the conservative Goldwaterites over the same issue that split the convention in San Francisco in 1964.

Whether Goldwater himself knows it, his closest political friends are quietly passing the word:

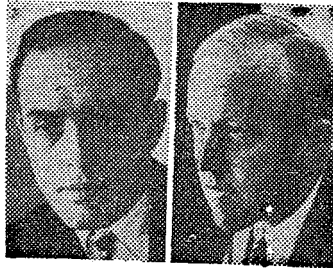
Since almost all the top party brass have come out individually against the John Birch Society (and most particularly its leader, Robert Welch), there is just no reason for the 28-member Coordinating Committee to deal with the question.

In fact, it is now widely believed by Republican moderates—who desperately want the RCC to go on record against extremists—that the right wing encouraged National Chairman Ray Bliss to make his uncharacteristic ideological attack on "radical organizations" early last month.

Their reasoning is politically subtle. With Bliss (who speaks for the entire Republican Party) committed against "extremism," a formal Coordinating Committee resolution becomes superfluous.

EVEN Sen. Thruston B. Morton of Kentucky, highly respected Chairman of the Senate Republican Campaign Committee, is now neutral about having the Coordinating Committee pass an anti-Birch resolution.

Ironically, it was Morton who struck the first blow against the Society to come from any top Party figure



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since the disastrous Goldwater defeat last year. On Sept. 29, he said he would push an anti-Birch resolution at the Dec. 13 Coordinating Committee meeting.

Following Morton in almost ritualistic succession, just about every Republican leader—including Goldwater himself—came out with separate blasts of their own at Welch-style extremism (coupled with attacks on left-wing extremism).

Morton now says his resolution may not be necessary at the Coordinating Committee meeting. He adds, however, that if a demand develops, he'll go along.

But there is quite another viewpoint among other members of the Coordinating Committee, including progressive Governors Robert Smiley of Idaho, George Romney of Michigan and the Eastern liberals. They insist on a formal Party denunciation of the Birch Society with more vehemence today than at last year's national convention.

The background of Bliss's antiextremism statement in Albuquerque early last month offers an insight into the right-wing strategy to dispose of the whole issue without a Party declaration.

WALTER LIPPMANN is traveling in South America. His column will resume on his return later this month.

Strangely, Bliss's statement was submitted in advance to Tony Smith, Goldwater's old press secretary. Smith and former Goldwater speechwriter Karl Hess are now partners in Research Services, Inc., an outfit that does research for Goldwater and a few other private clients. Nevertheless, Smith was asked by Bliss to approve the text. He recommended several changes and sent it back to Bliss.

As finally delivered, the Bliss text singled out Welch, rather than the Birch Society itself. Generally, it fell far short of the blanket condemnation that the Smiley-Romney moderates want.

THUS, THE suspicion among moderates is that Bliss's statement was monitored by the conservatives in such a way that it would not be offensive to the right-wing but would go far enough to void any formal Party resolution.

The reason the conservatives will fight tooth-and-nail against a formal resolution is that it might cut off contributions from right-wing fat-cats. The reason Bliss himself is not eager for a formal Party statement is that it might infuriate genuine Republican conservatives, who view the anti-Birch resolution as directed by the liberals at the conservatives.

But most rank-and-file Republican politicians who have to run for election next year want a strong anti-Birch resolution adopted—unanimously if possible.

The reason: According to all the signs, the Democratic Party's main campaign strategy will be to tie the right-wing albatross around all Republican candidates. A strong anti-Birch statement now would rip this Democratic strategy to shreds.

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